

The human spy isn't obsolete

Canada recently expelled 11 Soviet diplomats and officials, accusing them of being spies. The United States has for the same reason ordered Viet Nam's chief delegate to the United Nations to leave. West Germany has been rocked by one spy scandal after another.

Obviously the Communists have by no means phased out the living, breathing secret agent. In an age of spy satellites and other exotic gadgets, the human "spook" is far from obsolete.

Because the Communists have been sensationally successful at espionage ever since World War II [it enabled them to save years in developing the atomic bomb], it is worth pondering the importance they continue to place on the human spy. Especially since our own Central Intelligence Agency has slashed the staff of its operations division—which handles clandestine activities—from 8,000 during the Viet Nam War to 4,700 at the time Adm. Stansfield Turner became CIA director last fall.

Since then, Adm. Turner has dismissed 820 more, although he says these were replaced by younger people. We take the admiral's word and hope neither he nor President Carter contemplates any further cuts.

These reductions plus Adm. Turner's reputation for abrasiveness have no doubt contributed to the low morale in his agency.

We trust he will do what he can to ease these problems, because the organization's morale was already low enough as a result of disclosures made during congressional investigations of its activities. This publicity has also doubtless cost the CIA some valuable informants.

A KGB agent quoted in a recent Time

Magazine makes this point: "Of all the operations that the Soviet Union and the U.S. have conducted against each other, none has benefitted the KGB as much as the campaign in the U.S. to discredit the CIA. . . . Today our boys have it a lot easier, and we didn't have to lift a finger. You did all our work for us."

This is a disheartening appraisal of the effects of what started out as a commendable inquiry into excesses committed by the CIA. A free society has a right to know about and to stop evils committed in its name.

But that exercise is now completed. Legislation to curb further excesses has been introduced. The new director has pledged to hold covert political activities to a minimum.

It is time now to recognize that, while some of the things done by the CIA were distasteful, dirty, and despicable, the intelligence gathering function remains a respectable and necessary one in today's world.

President Carter has expressed confidence in Adm. Turner by elevating him to the dictatorship of all U.S. intelligence agencies. He deserves the widest possible support in order to regain for the agency the best possible human intelligence gathering and analysis. As an intelligence expert has said with reference to today's world: We know from inanimate devices like satellites what strengths a potential adversary has, but we need human beings to tell us what he intends to do with those strengths. This kind of information is crucial in today's world, and it can be obtained only by human fact gatherers with good sources coupled with good analysts of the meaning of those facts. Let us regain these things with all possible speed.